

THE NOVEL CITY

PUSHING HOPE

It was only when Terrance Kelleman hit bottom that he realized what his life's work would be. Now, as a chemical-dependency counselor, he helps others reclaim their lives, too.

By Scott Lax

The 51-year-old man sitting across from me could pass for a prosperous record executive, with his fashionably long hair, hound's-tooth blazer, black wool knit shirt, black pants and nice loafers. His new, well-appointed office has a calm ambiance. Terry Kelleman, a certified chemical-dependency counselor, is the picture of a healthy man in early middle age doing what he loves.

But there is another picture of Kelleman, an old black-and-white newspaper photo of him backed against a brick wall in an alleyway. Four Elyria policemen and a bomb-sniffing dog stand in front of him. Moments after that photograph was taken, Kelleman was arrested for bank robbery.

What happened between the alley and the office is a story of hope for every drug addict and alcoholic, or anybody who thinks there's no way out of his or her predicament. Terry Kelleman has been to the heart of darkness and back, and now he devotes his life to telling his story and trying to help others find their way back to their lives.

Kelleman was an all-American boy from Rocky River, a high-school track star and the singer in a popular rock band. His idol was Jim Morrison, the Doors' doomed lead singer. Morrison got high and raucous on stage and people loved him. So Kelleman did

the same thing. It worked for a while — even under the influence of alcohol and drugs, he excelled at sports.

His drinking and drug use continued in college, then got heavier. He lost his scholarship and got kicked out of his band. As Kelleman slid into the oblivion of addiction, he left school and hung out with a hard-core crowd. His band gave him a second chance, but after a few gigs, he was back to his old ways. He was kicked out for good.

Drugs and drinking became Kelleman's life. He blamed everyone else for his troubles. He married a model, but the marriage ended badly.

He did more cocaine, played a little music, isolated himself from his old friends and his family.

Then, on Oct. 2, 1981, Terry Kelleman, handsome former athlete and rock singer who had once opened for the Who, walked into a bank and told the teller he had a bomb strapped to his body. She gave him a bag of money. He walked next door to a bar and drank and did coke. He partied all night. He told the bartender, "Tomorrow I'm going to rob another bank, and if they don't catch me I'll come back and take you to lunch."

"Please give me your money, I have a booby trap,"

said the note he gave the teller at the second bank the next day. "You'd better get out of here," the teller replied. "Give me the money and I'll leave," Kelleman responded.

He was caught in the alley and eventually sentenced to two seven- to 25-year sentences for bank robbery. In 120 days, after receiving shock probation, he was sitting on the couch at his parents' home, the place where he'd gone for his second, third, 100th chances.

"I told my mom, 'If I ever get out of this, some day, some way, I'm going to work with other people.' My mother kept telling me, 'God must have saved you for a reason.'"

It's 17 years later. After a long run as a counselor at Oakview Behavioral Health Center in Middleburg Heights, Kelleman recently opened up his own treatment practice. It's all he wants to do. He doesn't waffle about why.

"Drugs lie. Alcohol lies. You need someone to stand up and say it's false. It's death, it's deception, it's prison," he says. "I've dedicated my life to what I'm doing. I know the pain addiction caused me. When I'm in the john washing my hands, I look in the mirror and say, 'Who's better equipped to help these people than you, Terry? You've been there; you've lived it. By all rights you're playing with the house money. It's time to give it back. Help these people.' That's why I'm here." ■

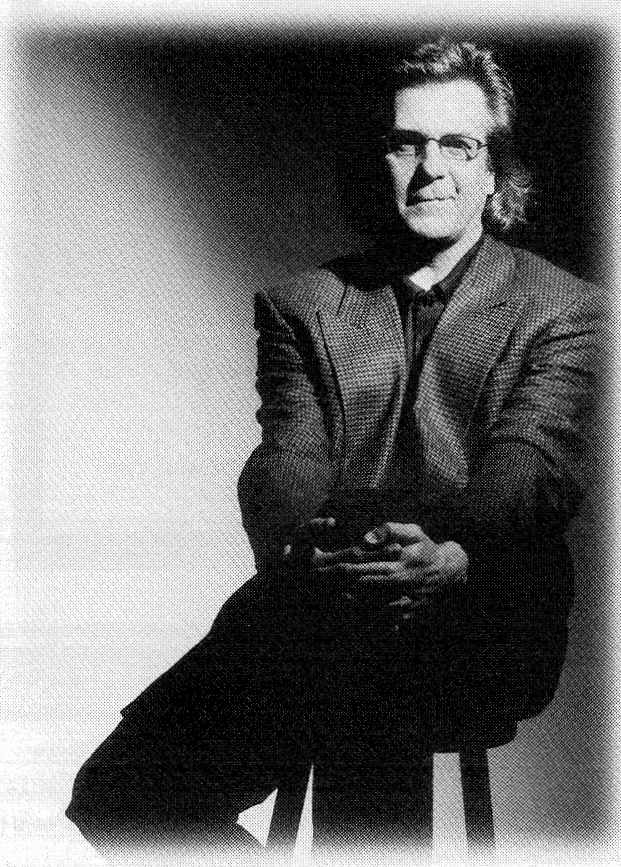


PHOTO • STEVE VACCARIELLO